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UM Men's Cross Country Team
Qualifies for NCAA Meet

Two months ago, the University of Montana men's cross country team, having been picked to finish fifth in the Big Sky Conference, was given little chance of earning a berth in the NCAA Cross Country Championships. But last Saturday in Boise, Idaho, the Grizzlies proved the pre-season pollsters wrong by finishing second in the Big Sky and third in District-Seven of the NCAA. And that third-place finish put the team in the nationals.

Saturday's meet was really three races in one. It determined the champions of the Big Sky and Western Athletic Conferences, and it was the District-Seven Championship. The top three teams in the District-Seven race were awarded berths in the NCAA National Championship.

The University of Texas at El Paso, the defending NCAA champion and a strong favorite to repeat this year, easily outdistanced the field Saturday. UTEP finished with 24 points. Nevada-Reno was second with 90, followed by the Grizzlies with 134.

Nevada-Reno was the winner in the Big Sky race with 46 points to Montana's 76. Not far behind were Northern Arizona with 85, Weber St. with 90 and Idaho St. with 95.

"What was really significant was our over-all team strength," said first-year coach Larry Heidebrecht. "On paper, we should have been fifth (in the district), but our runners really wanted it badly."

The Grizzlies were led by senior Tom Raunig, who finished second in the Big Sky race and was eighth over-all. Raunig completed the 10,000 meter course in 29:42.3.

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Cross Country--add one

"He ran a very intelligent race," said Heidebrecht.

Also placing in the top ten of the Big Sky Conference was senior Dave Gordon. He was sixth in 30:05.6. That time was good enough for 13th place over-all.

Other scores for the Grizzlies were Greg Downing (21st in the Big Sky, 35th over-all), Mike Brady (23rd, 38th) and Kevin Dilley (24th, 40th).

According to Heidebrecht, Dilley was the key to the Grizzlies' success. That was because Brian Turner, usually in the top five among UM runners, was slowed by a muscle cramp he developed during the race. Heidebrecht said that when Turner got hurt, "we had to have somebody step in and Dilley did. He just latched onto Brady and stayed with him to the finish."

Heidebrecht and his runners will now turn their attention to preparing for the nationals, which will be run in Wichita, Kan., Nov. 24. Heidebrecht said it will be only the second time in history Montana has entered a team in that event. UM has been eligible for the nationals several times, but has been unable to compete because of limited funds. However, the NCAA now picks up the costs associated with competing in the nationals.

Twenty-nine teams will be competing in Wichita. Heidebrecht said his goal is to finish in the top 15. That's a far cry from the goal he set when he took over the team earlier in the year: fourth place in the Big Sky.

"I didn't think we would be this good," he said. "But I didn't realize how close these guys are as a group and how tough they are. But I found out in a hurry."

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